

Buad Kholes, Arianna Taddei, Catia Giaconi

INCLUDING JERUSALEM

Educational Justice, Inclusion,
and Community Resilience



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Collana di studi e problemi di Pedagogia Sociale

fondata da

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Buad Kholes, Arianna Taddei, Catia Giaconi

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1. Methodological Limitations of the Research

The study presented in this volume was conceived as a participatory pedagogical inquiry aimed at understanding how educational communities develop inclusive and participatory processes and protect the right to education in a context of protracted emergency. This methodological approach, consistent with a transformative perspective on educational research, is at once one of the study's principal strengths and one of its inherent limitations.

The first critical issue concerns the research context itself: political instability, territorial fragmentation, and constantly changing conditions of school access, all of which worsened during the data collection phase. The dynamic nature of the emergency required methodological adaptations, making it impossible to ensure fully consistent data collection conditions across time and space. As such, the gathered data provide a snapshot of a constantly evolving context, in which educational conditions change rapidly according to geopolitical developments. The conflict situation also prevented the Palestinian researchers from reaching the participating schools due to restrictions on freedom of movement, while the Italian research team from the University of Macerata was unable to carry out the on-site missions originally planned due to security concerns. Consequently, most of the research activities were conducted remotely, without the detail that field visits and face-to-face exchanges with the various stakeholders would have supplied and that would have allowed researchers to assess the contextual landscape.

A second limitation is the contextual nature of the sample. The schools in-

volved were all partners in the *Including Jerusalem* Project and are therefore deeply embedded in, and reflective of, the specific social, cultural, and institutional realities of East Jerusalem and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Consequently, the findings are not statistically representative of the Palestinian education system as a whole, nor are they generalisable to other emergency settings. Rather, the value of this study lies in generating contextually grounded knowledge that contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexity of inclusive processes within a specific educational ecosystem.

A further consideration concerns the participatory nature of the research. The collaboration between Palestinian and Italian researchers constituted a valuable epistemological resource, fostering ongoing exchange across different cultural, professional, and scientific perspectives. However, as in any participatory study, the interpretation of the data stems from co-constructed meaning-making, which reduces the risk of ethnocentric interpretations but does not entirely eliminate the influence of different interpretive standpoints.

Finally, the adoption of a mixed methods research design enabled the integration of quantitative and qualitative data, providing a nuanced understanding of educational practices, representations of inclusion, and the experiences of the various groups of participants. This methodological choice was not, however, aimed at identifying causal relationships or evaluating the effectiveness of specific educational interventions. Rather, it sought to deepen understanding of the processes through which school communities develop everyday practices of participation and resilience.

2. Implications for Pedagogy and International Cooperation

Beyond the empirical findings, this research offers some broader reflections on the role of pedagogy in protracted emergency contexts. A first implication concerns moving beyond a limited notion of inclusion as access to schooling or provision of compensatory measures. The Palestinian experience demonstrates that inclusive education is, first and foremost, a process of building educational communities capable of fostering participation, a sense of belonging, well-being, and Quality of Life, even under conditions of heightened vulnerability. From this perspective, schools emerge not only as places of learning but also as relational spaces where trust, educational continuity, and hope can be rebuilt. Inclusion thus acquires a profoundly ethical and political dimension, geared towards the protection of human rights, the promotion of social justice, and the enhancement of re-

sources already existing within communities. A second implication concerns the significance of international cooperation.

The study's findings suggest that cooperation should not be understood solely as the transfer of expertise or the implementation of externally developed educational models. Rather, it can serve as an epistemological framework grounded in dialogue among different forms of knowledge, the promotion of local expertise, and the collaborative production of research. In this regard, universities, schools, institutions, and local communities become co-producers of scientific knowledge, contributing to the development of educational models that are more responsive to the contexts and cultures in which they are implemented. The research also highlights the need to strengthen teacher training in the interpersonal, reflective, and emotional competences required for teaching in emergency settings, alongside pedagogical and instructional knowledge. The ability to create inclusive learning environments, promote well-being, and foster the resilience of educational communities is now an essential component of the teaching profession.

3. Prospects for Future Research

The reflections set out in this volume point towards several avenues for future exploration. A first priority is the need to carry out longitudinal studies capable of examining how inclusive processes evolve over time and how educational communities progressively adapt their strategies for inclusion and resilience in response to prolonged crises. At the same time, comparative research across different emergency settings (including armed conflicts, forced displacement, natural disasters, and public health emergencies) would help to identify both the common elements and the context-specific characteristics that shape inclusive educational processes. Further research could also explore in greater depth teachers' professional competences, school leadership practices, and the contribution of families and local community networks to the development of inclusive educational communities. Particular attention should also be paid to the adoption of an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw, 1989; De Vita & Romano, 2025; Taddei, 2020) capable of analysing how gender, disability, socio-economic status, cultural background, and migration status interact in shaping educational vulnerabilities and opportunities for participation. Finally, this study highlights the need to strengthen international networks of pedagogical research on inclusive education in emergency contexts. The complexity of contemporary challenges makes it increasingly necessary to promote collaborative frameworks – involving universities,

educational institutions, international organisations, and local communities – aimed at understanding these phenomena and transforming educational practices and public policies by generating shared knowledge. From this perspective, the present volume does not seek to offer universally applicable models. Rather, it aims to bring the Palestinian experience into the international debate on inclusive education in emergency contexts. In doing so, the specific nature of the context under investigation becomes a valuable resource for rethinking inclusion as a process of educational justice, while reaffirming the role of pedagogical research as a tool for critical interpretation and social transformation.

4. Epistemological Reflections: Towards a Pedagogy of Situated Knowledge and Dialogical Research

The study generated a number of epistemological reflections that are particularly relevant to the advancement of inclusive education in emergency contexts. A first consideration concerns the relationship between theory and context. The analysis carried out confirms that inclusive education cannot be interpreted through prescriptive models; instead, it requires pedagogical planning that is deeply rooted in the specific characteristics of educational contexts. In situations of protracted emergency, the political, cultural, social, and relational conditions continuously redefine needs, resources, and opportunities for participation. Consequently, educational responses cannot be standardised but must remain dynamic, context-responsive, and personalised. Within this framework, personalisation extends beyond adapting teaching strategies to the individual needs of students. Rather, it encompasses the entire process of developing educational responses. It involves the ability to engage critically with the complexity of specific contexts, recognise the resources available within local communities, and design interventions that emerge through dialogue with those involved, rather than through the application of models developed elsewhere. This perspective is grounded in the paradigm of situated knowledge (Clarke, 2005; Fosket, 2015), according to which academic work does not seek to produce abstract and decontextualised truths, but rather to construct interpretations that are firmly rooted in the historical, cultural, and relational conditions in which they emerge. In emergency contexts, this approach becomes even more significant, as it enables the complexity of educational experiences to be recognised while avoiding reductive interpretations of vulnerability.

A second reflection concerns the process through which scientific knowledge is generated in the context of international cooperation. The research experience

confirms that collaboration between researchers from different cultural backgrounds represents not merely an organisational choice but a genuine epistemological framework. The shared development of data collection tools, the collegial discussion of interpretations, and the comparison of different perspectives were key factors in developing a more nuanced understanding of the educational phenomena observed. The adoption of a dialogic approach sought to address 2 complementary epistemological risks. On the one hand, there was the threat of the researchers identifying too closely with the participants in the study, which might have exacerbated subjectivity to the extent of obscuring the necessary critical reflection required by scientific research. Conversely, there was a risk of relying on external interpretive categories too far removed from the context, based on educational models developed within different cultural systems and unconsciously guided by a perspective of pedagogical colonialism (Leonardo et al., 2023; Patel, 2016; Pirbhai-Illich et al., 2017). In this second instance, the danger lies in interpreting local educational practices exclusively through normative and socio-cultural parameters developed in other contexts, thereby implicitly attributing a universal character to models that are, in fact, historically and culturally situated. The collaboration between Palestinian and Italian universities here represented a concrete attempt to overcome both these pitfalls by promoting an interpretive process based on epistemic reciprocity. None of the parties involved assumed the exclusive role of knowledge producer, and the various pedagogical traditions became participants in a dialogue aimed at the co-construction of meaning. Pedagogical research in emergency contexts is called upon to develop an epistemological paradigm based on reflexivity, reciprocity, and the recognition of the plurality of knowledge (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018; Finlay, 2002; Schön, 1993). From this perspective, the quality of research does not depend solely on the methodological rigour of the tools employed. It also rests on the ability to continually question the interpretive categories used, to explicitly state the researchers' positionalities and epistemological biases, and to produce shared knowledge through processes that combine scientific rigour, cultural sensitivity, and ethical responsibility.

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Authors' Notes

Voices from the Palestinian Research Team

This volume emerged from a process of research and reflection that gradually reshaped our understanding of inclusive education in the Palestinian context. What initially developed as an inquiry into educational policies, practices, and experiences increasingly demonstrated that inclusion cannot be examined independently of the broader conditions that structure the everyday lives of schools, teachers, students, and families. Throughout the research process, it became evident that questions of access, participation, well-being, and educational equity are inseparable from the social, political, and institutional realities within which educational communities operate.

For the Al-Quds University research team, this research was both an academic and a personal process of reflection. As Palestinian researchers and educators, we were closely connected to the context we were studying, yet the research required us to look beyond what seemed familiar and listen carefully to the different experiences of teachers, students, parents, and school communities. Fieldwork showed us that these experiences could not be reduced to abstract categories. They reflected educational aspirations alongside uncertainty, psychological pressure, limited resources, overcrowding, and disrupted continuity. Lived experience therefore became not only evidence, but an important source of knowledge that required careful and responsible representation.

One of the key insights that emerged concerns the close relationship between well-being and inclusive education. Well-being cannot be understood simply as an individual psychological state; it is also shaped by relationships, school prac-

tices, and the ability of educational institutions to create continuity, meaning, and belonging under difficult conditions. Similarly, inclusion involves more than physical access to education. It requires recognising learners' circumstances, responding to their needs, and creating conditions that enable meaningful participation. The research also highlighted the educational resilience of teachers, students, and families. Flexible classroom practices, supportive teacher–student relationships, and partnerships with families helped sustain continuity and belonging. However, resilience must not be romanticised. The ability of educational communities to adapt cannot replace the structural support, resources, safety, and stability they need. Recognising resilience should never obscure unmet needs or shift institutional responsibility onto individuals. Sustainable inclusion therefore requires collective and structural responses, including supportive policies, professional and psychological support, and institutional resources.

Our collaboration within the Including Jerusalem Project further strengthened these reflections. Working across different academic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds created an important space for questioning assumptions and reconsidering concepts such as inclusion, well-being, participation, resilience, and educational rights. It reinforced our belief that the Palestinian context cannot simply be interpreted through theoretical frameworks developed elsewhere. Instead, theory and context must remain in dialogue, and local researchers and communities must play an active role in shaping research questions, interpretations, and knowledge.

Ultimately, this work does not offer a final answer but opens further questions about how inclusive education can support well-being without individualising structural responsibilities, recognise resilience without normalising adversity, and protect learners' dignity and participation in complex and uncertain circumstances. For us, inclusive education is not a fixed model but an ongoing process shaped by recognition, participation, well-being, dignity, and educational justice. The responsibility to listen to and learn from these experiences continues. This research documents how educational communities endure and adapt, while emphasising that their voices and experiences are valuable sources of knowledge that can shape academic debate, educational practice, and policy.

Voices from the Italian Research Team

This volume grew out of a series of shared questions that, over time, came to shape both our research and fieldwork: *what does it mean to speak of inclusion*

when the very context in which inclusion is pursued is marked by borders, permits, checkpoints, territorial fragmentation, and different forms of violence? Can inclusion really be the primary concern in a place where, at times, it is not even possible to physically reach a school? Where poverty, instability, and war permeate everyday life, interrupt educational journeys, fracture family relationships, and continually test the resilience of entire communities? We soon realised that these questions first had to be lived with before they could be answered, requiring us to remain within the tensions and contradictions they inevitably raised.

More than anything else, this research became an exercise in mutual listening and trust among researchers whose cultural, personal, and academic backgrounds are, at times, shared and, at others, profoundly different. This book is written from different standpoints, and it is important to acknowledge this openly. Some of us observe East Jerusalem from the outside, through the lenses (and inevitably the limitations) of a European academic perspective. Others live this reality every day, teaching and conducting research in a place that is not simply an object of study, but a space of everyday life. Working alongside researchers who have lived the complexities and challenges of the Palestinian context throughout their lives meant taking their reading of reality as our starting point, a reading that cannot be separated from their experiences as women, Palestinian citizens, and scholars working within that context. At the same time, this encounter required us to critically reflect on our own interpretations, assumptions, and representations, many of which had been shaped by a Western perspective on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, Palestinian society, and the educational and social dynamics that characterise it. Although our research questions, methodological choices, data analysis, and interpretations were continuously discussed, mediated, and negotiated, they inevitably remained informed by these two perspectives. Carrying forward the activities of the Including Jerusalem Project and writing this volume therefore meant constantly pausing to ask one another: “What does this mean to you? Does it make sense to us? How would you express it in your own words?” Much of our work over the past few years unfolded across Arabic, English, and Italian, not simply as a matter of translation, but as a genuine space for meaning making. Time and again, we found ourselves stopping to ask whether we were really talking about the same thing, and accepting that, at times, we were not.

As a research team, we experienced first-hand the instability and unpredictability of the context, restrictions on mobility, the suspension of school activities, and research timelines that continually expanded or contracted. Responding to these challenges required creativity, adaptability, and ongoing reflexivity. In contexts shaped by uncertainty, we came to understand that rigour cannot lie in the

rigid application of predetermined procedures. Instead, it resides in remaining faithful to the research questions while consciously adapting the methods and pathways needed to address them. Collaborating across distance, between different time zones, political and humanitarian contexts in constant flux, and interactions mediated almost entirely through a screen, required us to patiently build a relationship capable of withstanding moments of misunderstanding and distance. We do not take this trust for granted. It was built over time by returning, again and again, to unresolved questions, openly acknowledging the difficulties faced by each of us, and sharing a commitment to continue the project even as the circumstances became increasingly challenging and complex.

It was precisely through the processes of professional reflexivity initiated during the workshops and sustained throughout the research that we came to recognise that acknowledging one's own positionality also means questioning the often non-neutral conditions under which scientific collaboration takes shape. Although these pages formally mark the conclusion of a project, they also leave us with scientific, ethical, and human questions that remain open, together with the responsibilities they continue to entail.

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Including Jerusalem. Educational Justice, Inclusion, and Community Resilience presents a pedagogical research and international cooperation initiative promoted by EducAid NGO, aimed at promoting inclusive educational processes in primary schools in East Jerusalem and surrounding areas within the Including Jerusalem project. The initiative seeks to advance the right to inclusive and quality education in a context of protracted emergency, fostering dialogue between research, educational communities, and context-responsive practices. The volume approaches inclusion as a pedagogical paradigm through which the relationships between rights, participation, social justice, and Quality of Life can be critically explored, recognising schools and educational communities as key settings for fostering individual and collective resilience, belonging, and opportunities for the future. Drawing on the perspectives of researchers, school leaders, teachers, students, and families, the book captures the complexity of the Palestinian experience and highlights practices, professional competences, and community resources that can sustain inclusive processes even in conditions of profound vulnerability. The volume is addressed to those working in education, international cooperation, and pedagogical research, offering a context-sensitive perspective on inclusive education in emergencies and contributing to the international debate on inclusion, educational justice, and community resilience.

